



SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD, ELCA

Bishop Election 2021

Conversation Study Guide for Bishop's Election Pre-Identification Discernment

In this document you will find a conversation guide to equip your congregational and individual discernment for identifying potential nominees for the office of bishop of Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. Please follow this guide as you see fit. We believe the Holy Spirit is at work in our relationships, conversations, and prayers. We encourage you to work through this guide in small groups within your congregation or other ELCA assemblies. You may take as much time as you wish to walk through this process. However, this study guide is designed to take a minimum of 90 minutes to 2 hours to complete in order to allow thoughtful conversation and involvement of all participants. Thank you for your dedication and involvement in the future leadership for the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA.

Opening Prayer

"And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless" Philippians 1:9-10

Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for this day and this opportunity to gather as both servants and leaders of your church. Today we commit ourselves to deep wrestling and discernment as we consider potential nominees for the office of bishop for the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. You know where we all are in our journeys of faith. You know our deepest longings for the future of the ELCA. You know the challenges our Synod is facing in the coming years. Guide our conversations, thoughts, and prayers this day. Help us find agreements and help us to disagree respectfully and with a curiosity to understand differing views. And Lord, ultimately, let Your Will be done in our decisions. Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.

Part 1: The Role of a Bishop

1. Read together the General Responsibilities of the Bishop document in your packet.
2. *Group Discussion:* Were there any responsibilities listed that surprised you? Which items would you want the bishop of Southwestern Minnesota Synod to consider the highest priority? Why?
3. Consider the list of characteristics, traits, and gifts below. Circle the 5 items on that list that you believe are the most important characteristics needed to fulfill the responsibilities of bishop. Think on the responsibilities that were of the highest priority for you and your group as you choose these 5 items. If you can think of any gifts that are not included on this list, please add them here as well.
4. *Group Discussion:* Share your top characteristics with each other and discuss why you chose them. Were any characteristics chosen more often among your group? Why do you think that is?
5. Look at your own list of 5 characteristics. After discussion, are there any changes you wish to make to your list?
6. *Group Discernment:* Work through your lists and decide on the top 5 characteristics for your group. Make sure to consider any items people came up with outside of the written list. Write those 5 items somewhere all can see and set it aside.

General Characteristics, Traits and Gifts to Consider for the Role of Bishop:

Has deep faith	Has significant intercultural awareness and experience and sensitivity
Loves the church	Is courageous
Has been an effective congregational leader	Possesses administrative skills
Has pastoral presence	Has ability to delegate
Is theologically grounded	Likes to travel (in non-Covid realities)
Is focused on God's mission for God's church	Can balance work and life
Speaks for the poor and marginalized	Brings wisdom, insights, and understands the complexity of the church
Possesses emotional maturity and compassion while able to navigate criticism (thick skin)	Is not seduced by the title of bishop, doesn't let ego get in the way of the calling
Is a team builder and stewards human resources well	Has sound and healthy home life and relationships
Models patience and resilience	Is able to speak as a public figure
Is a good listener and is approachable	Has strong communication skills – verbal and written
Is a lifelong learner and teacher	Is well-informed about the world around us
Is flexible and receptive to change	Understands parliamentary procedure
Is able to discern priorities and act accordingly	Is skilled at running efficient meetings
Is a truth teller in love	Is technologically skilled
Possesses humor, humility, graciousness	
Is trustworthy, honest, and acts with integrity	

**This is by no means a comprehensive list of attributes one might consider in identifying a nominee for bishop. Perhaps you will come up with even more as you engage in conversations and discernment!*

Part 2: The Role and Ministry of the Synod

1. Read over the What a Synod Does document in your packet.
2. **Group Discussion:** Were there any responsibilities of Synod you did not know about before? Why do you think the Synod is responsible for these things? Are there any responsibilities you consider a higher priority than others? Why?
3. **Group Discernment:** Prioritize together the responsibilities of the Synod. Write these down next your top 5 characteristics for bishop and set aside.

Part 3: Identifying Names for the Role of Bishop

To whom shall the office of bishop be entrusted?

In this section, you will find questions and considerations to guide you in identifying potential nominees for bishop of Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. Please use any or all these questions to allow the Holy Spirit to guide your discernment. As you list as many names as you can think of for these questions, please remember that any Rostered Minister of Word and Sacrament for the ELCA in good standing may serve the role of Synodical Bishop. They do not have to currently reside in Southwestern Minnesota Synod to be nominated for bishop. Think of as many names as you can for each question.

1. What character traits and qualities are important in one who is called to serve and steward the office of bishop in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA?
2. Who models a strong witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a deep sense of the mission that God's faithful people are called to share?
3. Who is grounded in Lutheran theology and yet can embrace and witness to God's expansive love in diverse settings?
4. Who has administrative skills amongst a wide array of gifts to create and maintain a competent and vital team on the synod staff and among other synod leaders?
5. Who is emotionally competent to handle the most difficult of human relationships and controversy in disciplinary matters that will affect people's lives in profound ways?
6. Who has the physical stamina to meet the rigor of the calling and yet, can set personal boundaries for self-care?
7. Who casts a compelling vision for the future while recognizing and honoring the past, considering context, identity, and culture?

Group Discussion: Did any names come to you for multiple questions? Why did you consider this person? What gifts do you see in this person? How well do you think this person fits the list of 5 characteristics, prioritized responsibilities of the synod, and 3 ministry priorities your group listed? Why?

Group Discernment: For each name discussed above, please take a moment to pray over this Rostered Minister of Word and Sacrament. You can use the prayer below or use your own. Afterwards, you must decide on one name for your congregation to submit as a potential nominee for the office of bishop. Use the link provided to the [Bishop Nomination Form](#) to submit your name. Please remember a few things as you complete this process:

- Please inform the person you are nominating of your intent and send them the link to the [Bishop Biographical Data Form](#) found in the welcome letter of your packet. They will also be contacted by the Bishop Election Committee to confirm their openness to the call.
- Individuals who are voting members in their congregation may also submit one name. If you or your congregation wrestled deeply with more than one name, an individual may submit the additional name using the link to the [Bishop Nomination Form](#) found in the welcome letter of your packet.
- Submitting a name for nomination does NOT guarantee this person will be a nominee for the office of bishop. They may decide to remove their name from consideration. You will be informed if this happens. Furthermore, they must still be voted on in the first ballot of the bishop's election during Synod Assembly in June 2021. We strongly recommend electing voting member(s) from your congregation to represent your submitted name in the first ballot.

Prayer for each potential nominee: Lord, bless and guide the vocation of *name of potential nominee* as we consider identifying them for the office of bishop of Southwestern Minnesota Synod. Guide our conversation over them. Help us consider the many gifts and talents they have to offer as well as a vision for the future and mission of your church. May the Holy Spirit be active in each of our minds and hearts today. Amen.

Closing Prayer:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” John 14:27

God of Peace, Wisdom and Understanding, we thank You for this time together. We thank You for the chance to dig deeper into the work of the ELCA and to find our place in it. We thank You for the chance to wrestle with the future of the church and its leadership. We thank You for the vocation of Pastor *potential nominee you decided on*. As we prepare to nominate this person that could fulfill the office of bishop of Southwestern Minnesota, be with them. Guide their discernment as You have guided our own. May we go forth from this process in joy and in the peace only You can provide. Be with us in the months ahead as we continue this journey together. Amen.

